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FLORIDA MAN CONVICTED OF VISA FRAUD AND ALIEN SMUGGLING CONSPIRACY CHARGES

WASHINGTON – A Florida man has been convicted on seven counts of visa fraud and alien smuggling for his role in bringing aliens to work at major hotels and resorts in the Destin, Fla., area, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Gregory R. Miller of the Northern District of Florida announced today.

Justin King, 27, of Chipley, Fla., was convicted following a six-day jury trial in the Northern District of Florida in Pensacola of one count of conspiracy to commit visa fraud, five counts of visa fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit alien smuggling. Evidence presented to the jury showed that the conspiracy began as early as 1999, and escalated in 2003 when King's co-conspirators successfully brought in more than 200 aliens to work as hotel housekeepers using fraudulent visas. King joined the conspiracy in 2005, and created and mailed fraudulent visa applications seeking more than 1,500 additional aliens.

Foreigners can apply for non-immigrant visas called H2-B visas that permit them to come to the United States and temporarily work as unskilled laborers for a specific employer, if there are no local U.S. workers available for hire. Evidence presented during the trial showed that in some instances, the defendant and his co-conspirators had submitted visa petitions seeking to bring in substantially more alien workers than what client hotels had contracted for or needed. In other instances, the defendant and his co-conspirators used the forged letterhead of hotels to further their scam. Most of the alien workers brought in through the fraudulent visa scheme were contracted out to hotels and resorts other than those listed on their visa.

According to the evidence, when the government became aware of the illegal conduct and stopped issuing visas petitioned by the labor contracting entity King and his co-conspirators were using, Eurohouse Holding Corporation, they created a new labor contracting corporation called Woland and continued their fraudulent activity.

King faces a maximum of five years in prison on the visa fraud conspiracy charge. The visa fraud and the alien smuggling conspiracy counts each carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The government is also seeking forfeiture of \$3.2 million from the four defendants involved in this matter. Senior U.S. District Judge Lacey A. Collier set sentencing for Feb. 12, 2008.

King's three co-conspirators, Anna Czerwien, 57, Aleksander V. Berman, 38, and Vyacheslave Adol'fovich Finkel (also known as Stan), 45, had previously pleaded guilty and testified against King. The three await sentencing.

The investigation of the case began in late 2005. The indictment resulted from joint investigation by the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service, the Department of Labor's Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigation, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Citizenship and Immigration Service and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agencies. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Tiffany H. Eggers of the Northern District of Florida and Trial Attorney Arlene Reidy of the Domestic Security Section of the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.

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